(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) In recent past, Pakistani leaders have often referred to Kashmir as the "core" issue between the two countries. This is not in accordance with any agreement between the two countries nor even some of the earlier positions of Pakistani leaders, including Heads of State and Government, who had on several occasions supported the approach of tackling easier issues first, the more intractable ones later, and moving step by step through the process of confidence building.

(b) Prime Minister had, on April 18, 2003 extended the hand of friendship once again to Pakistan. Subsequently, India has taken the initiative to move in a step-by-step manner to normalise diplomatic and other links between the two countries. Government also believe that creation of a conducive atmosphere for a sustained dialogue necessarily requires an end to cross border terrorism and dismantling of its infrastructure. Progress in economic cooperation, cultural exchanges and people to people contacts would help create an environment in which difficult issues could be addressed.

Release of Pakistani prisoners

†490. SHRI MOTILAL VORA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Pakistani prisoners Government propose to release in exchange of 20 Indian prisoners released by Pakistan;

(b) the number of Indian prisoners released by Pakistan last time and the number of Pakistan prisoners released by India;

(c) the number of Indian prisoners in Pakistan at present and out of them, the number of Prisoners of War of 1971; and

(d) the steps being taken by Government for releasing of the said prisoners?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Government announced on May

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.

26, 2003 the release of 60 Pakistani civilian prisoners and 70 fishermen as soon as Pakistan indicates its readiness to accept them and the established procedures are completed by the Government of Pakistan. Following this, 6 Pakistani civilian prisoners were released on 25.6.2003.

(b) Pakistan released 20 Indian prisoners and India released 6 Pakistani prisoners last time.

(c) As per available information, 863 Indian civil prisoners, 319 fishermen and 54 missing Indian defence personnel are believed to be in custody in Pakistan.

(d) Government has consistently taken up the case of early release and repatriation of Indian prisoners in Pakistan through diplomatic channels. Prisoners are released after completion of their jail sentences and verification of their national status.

Discussion of Foreign Secretary Regarding Troops to Iraq

491. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India's Foreign Secretary during his recent visit to Washington met the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defence and the Deputy Secretary of State to discuss the American request of sending Indian troops as part of stabilisation force in Iraq;

(b) whether he pointed out to them various grey areas in the proposal including those in the UN Resolution on the subject; if so, the details of the Indian concerns discussed and grey areas pointed out to them; and

(c) the U.S. response thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes.

(b) Foreign Secretary conveyed our assessment of the provisions of the UNSC resolution 1483. He sought clarifications on a number of issues, including the security situation in Iraq, development of a responsible Iraqi Interim Administration, future political evolution in Iraq and humanitarian and relief activities. Operational issues such as